

*Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010*

## **The President's Weekly Address**

*August 21, 2010*

As the political season heats up, Americans are already being inundated with the usual phone calls and mailings and TV ads from campaigns all across the country. But this summer, they're also seeing a flood of attack ads run by shadowy groups with harmless-sounding names. We don't know who's behind these ads, and we don't know who's paying for them.

The reason this is happening is because of a decision by the Supreme Court in the *Citizens United* case, a decision that now allows big corporations to spend unlimited amounts of money to influence our elections. They can buy millions of dollars worth of TV ads, and worst of all, they don't even have to reveal who is actually paying for them. You don't know if it's a foreign-controlled corporation. You don't know if it's BP. You don't know if it's a big insurance company or a Wall Street bank. A group can hide behind a phony name like Citizens for a Better Future, even if a more accurate name would be "Corporations for Weaker Oversight."

We tried to fix this last month. There was a proposal supported by Democrats and Republicans that would've required corporate political advertisers to reveal who's funding their activities. When special interests take to the airwaves, whoever's running and funding the ad would have to appear in the advertisement and take responsibility for it, like a company's CEO or an organization's biggest contributor. And foreign-controlled corporations and entities would be restricted from spending money to influence American elections, just as they were in the past.

You would think that making these reforms would be a matter of common sense. You'd think that reducing corporate and even foreign influence over our elections wouldn't be a partisan issue. But the Republican leaders in Congress said no. In fact, they used their power to block the issue from even coming up for a vote.

This can only mean that the leaders of the other party want to keep the public in the dark. They don't want you to know which interests are paying for the ads. The only people who don't want to disclose the truth are people with something to hide.

Well, we cannot allow the corporate takeover of our democracy. So we're going to continue to fight for reform and transparency. And I urge all of you to take up the same fight. Let's challenge every elected official who benefits from these ads to defend this practice or join us in stopping it.

At a time of such challenge for America, we can't afford these political games. Millions of Americans are struggling to get by, and their voices shouldn't be drowned out by millions of dollars in secret, special interest advertising. Their voices should be heard.

Let's not forget that a century ago, it was a Republican President, Teddy Roosevelt, who first tried to tackle the issue of corporate influence on our elections. He actually called it "one of the principal sources of corruption in our political affairs." And he proposed strict limits on corporate influence in elections. "Every special interest is entitled to justice," he said, "but not one is entitled to a vote in Congress, to a voice on the bench, or to representation in any public office."

We now face a similar challenge and a similar opportunity to prevent special interests from gaining even more clout in Washington. This shouldn't be a Democratic issue or a Republican issue. This is an issue that goes to whether or not we have a democracy that works for ordinary Americans, a government of, by, and for the people. Let's show the cynics and the special interests that we still can.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 4:05 p.m. on August 13 in the Library at the White House for broadcast on August 21. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 20 but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on August 21.

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